



Lincolnshire Sub Regional Empty Homes Strategy 2010 - 2013



Housing People and Helping Communities by Bringing
Empty Homes Back into Use

Date of publication: June 2010

Date of Approval:

Approved by:

New or existing strategy: New Strategy

Index

1. Policy Statement
2. Introduction
3. Background
 - 3.1 Statistics
4. Aims and Objectives:
 - 4.1 Aims of the Strategy
 - 4.2 Strategy Outcomes
5. Strategy:
 - 5.1 The Definition of an Empty Property
 - 5.2 How are Empty Homes Identified?
 - 5.3 Why Properties are Left Empty?
 - 5.4 How We Will Bring Empty Homes Back into Use
6. Roles and Responsibilities:
 - 6.1 The Key Stakeholders
 - 6.2 Implementing the Strategy
 - 6.3 Other Organisations Involved
7. Monitoring Review and Development
8. Links to other Strategies
9. Communication
10. Contact Details
11. Appendices
 - 11.1 Action Plan
 - 11.2 Flow Chart – Empty Homes Pathway
 - 11.3 Survey and Research Summary
 - 11.4 Statutory Powers in Relation to Empty Homes
 - 11.5 Scoring Sheet and Methodology

1. Policy Statement

Boston Borough Council, City of Lincoln Council, East Lindsey District Council, North Kesteven District Council, South Holland District Council and West Lindsey District Council as part of a Sub Regional Empty Homes Project are committed to providing the highest quality of service to all their residents. In order to do this the Councils have a responsibility to engage and support residents in achieving a sustainable and improved community through addressing issues arising from vacant properties across the districts.

2. Introduction

Throughout our society there are thousands of individuals who are homeless, and thousands more who live in accommodation drastically beneath their needs. There are also thousands of homes spread through the country which are vacant or empty. These homes are not only a wasted resource, but have an increasing negative effect on the communities, becoming focal points for illegal and anti-social behaviour, increased cost of renovation as their condition deteriorates, a strain on agencies such as Fire and Rescue, as well as becoming a risk to the public through unsafe structures, harbouring litter and vermin and effecting neighbouring house prices.

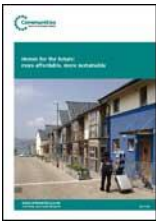
An empty homes initiative gives focus and drive when providing mechanisms to bring empty properties back into use. From this more houses will come into the market, benefiting the community by increasing the stock of decent homes, providing opportunities for more affordable housing, reducing green house gas emissions from building new homes, decrease anti social behaviour, reduced risk from unsafe structures, provide an income for the owner and help to maintain the housing market.

The strategy sets out to:

- Identify the key issues in empty property working.
- Set objectives and targets.
- Define good practice, powers and actions available.
- Build relationships both internally and externally with all parties involved in the reoccupation of empty properties.

3. Background

The Empty Homes Agency reports that across England in 2009 there were over 650,000 empty homes of which more than 300,000 are privately owned and have been empty for over 6 months. Bringing empty homes back into use is one of the Governments priorities in order to create sustainable communities and ensure everyone has access to a decent home. The Government along with other agencies have published numerous strategies and reports relating to Empty Homes. Following, is a brief summary of the initiatives, changes and legislation with an explanation of the impact they have at a local level:



- Homes for the future: More affordable, more sustainable (2007)
States that as part of the Local Authorities strategic role in increasing affordable housing, ways to make the best use of empty homes should be investigated.

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/homesforfuture

- Planning Policy Statement 3 (2006)

This Statement highlighted the need for local planning authorities to identify empty homes and bring them back into use.

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps3housing



- Sustainable Communities: Homes for All (2005)

Provides guidance on making homes decent, dealing with empty homes and increasing house building in order to provide a decent home for everyone at a price they can afford.

www.communities.gov.uk/archived/publications/corporate/homesforall



- Unlocking the Potential (2003)

Guidance issued by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister to inform owners and local authorities on how to bring empty homes back into use.

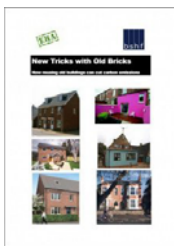
www.communities.gov.uk/archived/publications/housing/emptypropertyunlocking?view=Standard



- New Tricks with Old Bricks (2008)

The Empty Homes Agency produced a report showing how renovating the current housing stock produces less CO2 emissions than building new properties.

www.emptyhomes.com/documents/publications/reports/New%20Tricks%20With%20Old%20Bricks%20-%20final%2012-03-081.pdf



- Building Better Lives (2009)

The Audit Commission discusses the importance of ensuring targets into utilising the current housing stock are also prioritised along with building new homes.

http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/nationalstudies/buildingbetterlives/Pages/buildingbetterlives_copy.aspx

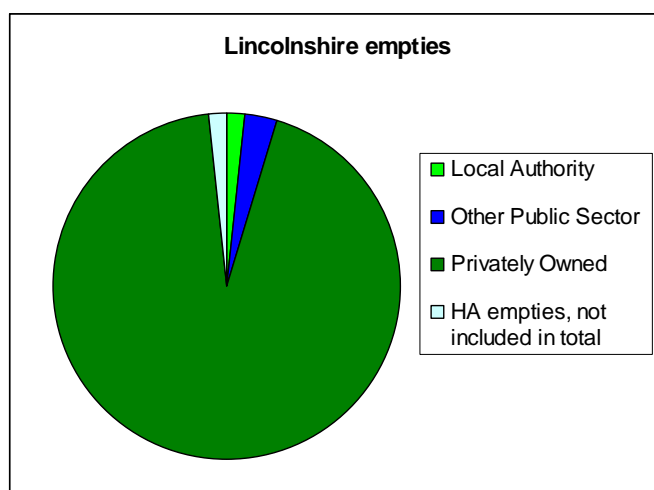


3.1 Statistics

Set out in the table is a breakdown of the vacant properties from the 2009 figures published from the Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA), the Housing Association empties were provided by the Tennant Services Authority (TSA). These have been presented so comparisons can be seen between the number of empty properties in England, the East Midlands, Lincolnshire and then between the 6 authorities included within the project.

	Total Vacant Properties	% of Housing Stock	Local Authority	Other Public Sector	Privately Owned	Private Owned 6 Months Vacant	% of Total Vacant as LTE	Housing Associations (not included in total)	Households on waiting list	Reasonable preference figures. *
England	651,993	2.9%	34,555	5,735	611,703	307,001	47%	32,287	1,763,140	
East Midlands	62,134	3.2%	3,332	591	58,211	29,797	48%	1,535	120,896	
Lincolnshire	10,555	3.3%	186	330	10,039	4,163	39%	170	20,850	
Boston Borough	924	3.3%	0	0	924	393	43%	29	1,977	984
City of Lincoln	1,794	4.3%	72	0	1,722	537	30%	12	3,559	1,653
East Lindsey	2,698	4.15%	0	87	2,611	1518	58%	39	5,452	1,748
North Kesteven	1,715	3.7%	40	173	1,502	732	41%	7	1,583	..
South Holland	723	1.9%	46	..	677	224	31%	4	2,082	..
West Lindsey	1,982	5%	1	70	1,911	700	35%	52	1,937	757

Reasonable preference figures represent those individuals on the housing register who are identified as having a housing need. Across the county this is done by either a points based system, or by using banding to define need. Therefore there may be slight differences in the requirements used in the production of the reasonable preference figures.

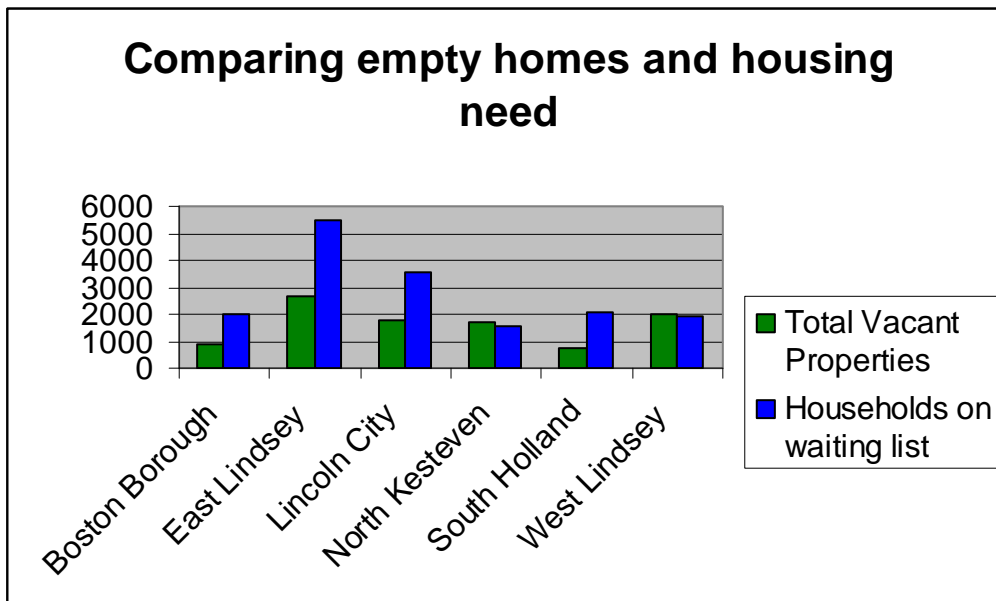


This highlights how the majority of vacant properties across Lincolnshire are made up of privately owned properties, of which almost half have been empty for over 6 months. Some of these long term empty homes have the potential to provide accommodation for families in need of housing. If all empty properties throughout Lincolnshire were reoccupied through the strategy, over

4000 families could be accommodated, and create rental revenue of £24,978,000 per year to the owners at market value rents, based on the average rent for a three bedroom property within Lincolnshire.

What the Statistics mean:

- The largest section of vacant housing is within the private sector.
- With the exception of South Holland the percentage of vacant properties in each area is higher than the East Midlands percentage, and either higher or equal to the Lincolnshire percentage.
- The average number of all total vacant properties for the authorities in Lincolnshire is **1507**. This total is exceeded by Lincoln, East Lindsey, North Kesteven and West Lindsey.
- The average number of privately owned properties vacant for 6 months or more within Lincolnshire is **594**. This is exceeded by East Lindsey, North Kesteven and West Lindsey.
- Also of note is the number of vacant other public sector properties within East Lindsey, North Kesteven and West Lindsey. Most of these are vacant defence housing properties which have been allocated to returning service personnel, but may be empty for a short period of time until that person returns. It is very rare that these become long term empty.

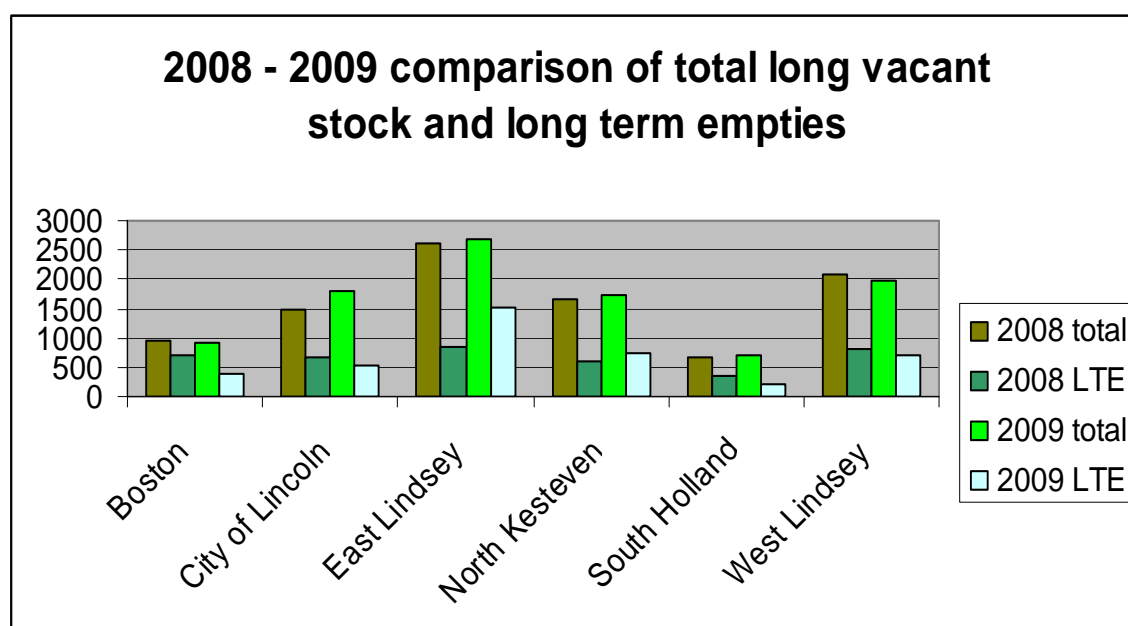


This graph shows how the total number of vacant properties in each area compares with the number of households on the waiting list.

Last years figures

	2008 total	2008 LTE	2009 total	2009 LTE
Boston	946	710	924	393
City of Lincoln	1480	665	1794	537
East Lindsey	2599	852	2698	1518
North Kesteven	1653	610	1715	732
South Holland	683	339	723	224
West Lindsey	2091	815	1982	700

This table shows the changes in both total empties, and long term empties from 2008 to 2009. There could be a number of reasons for these shifts in percentages, the Councils empty homes work, economic situations making it less viable to 'sit on' an empty property without tapping into its financial opportunities, and a better understanding and recording of empty homes data through the Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA).



4. Aims and Objectives

4.1 The aims of the strategy are to:

- Reduce the number of long term empties by district specific targets each year.
- Establish a positive relationship with owners of empty properties.
- Increase awareness of empty properties across the districts.
- Help to increase the supply of affordable housing, and reduce homelessness.
- Add to the number of good quality, energy efficient properties within each district.

4.2 Strategy outcomes

Awareness

- Continued awareness of the empty homes campaign and community interest in working with the Council to rejuvenate areas affected by empty homes.

Housing

- Reduction in the number of long term empty properties.
- Increased housing supply may help deliver affordable housing and reduce homelessness though increasing the number of private rented sector housing.
- Preservation of current housing and potentially bring historic buildings back in viable use.

Sustainability

- Increased stock of good quality housing which are energy efficient.
- Reduced carbon emissions by renovating existing houses.
- Increased regeneration and re-investment in communities.
- Increased local economic activity.

Crime and Anti Social Behaviour

- Reduced fly tipping, vandalism, arson and street drinking focused around empty properties.

5. The Strategy

5.1 The Definition of an Empty Property

A long term empty property is a unit of accommodation which has been unoccupied for 6 months or more. Privately owned long term empty properties are the focus of this strategy.

HSSA guidance states that the calculations for empty homes should include dwellings which are empty because they are:

- Between changing occupants
- Undergoing modernisation, repair or conversion
- Awaiting demolition
- Repossessed
- Awaiting probate
- Newly completed but not occupied
- Owned by a charity
- Unoccupied annexes
- Trustee is in bankruptcy
- Unfurnished and empty

It is these properties which fall within the remit of the strategy, and from which the statistics are produced.

The types of properties which aren't included are second homes, properties left vacant through the tax payer being in prison, left to live in a care home, giving or receiving care, uninhabitable by law, awaiting a minister of religion or left empty by a student. However there may be the need for the Council to act if a property becomes a problem or concern for the local residents.

5.2 How are Empty Homes Identified?

The main source of data on the location and owners of empty properties is identified through Council Tax records requested under the Local Government Act 2003, section (85). This allows the address of empty properties, the liable parties name, their address and contact details to be used for the identification of vacant dwellings and the start of the process of bringing vacant dwellings back into use.

The Council are also alerted to empty properties by the public through:

- Email referrals
- Telephone calls
- The Empty Homes Agency website
- Agents at landlord forums
- Other Council departments

Other agencies such as Fire and Rescue and Refuse may also have the opportunity and capability to identify empty homes. Strong inter agency links are vital in accurate identification of empty homes.

5.3 Why Properties are Left Empty?

Properties are left empty for a number of reasons. These tend to be because the property won't sell or let, the property is being renovated and the works are taking some time or, possibly because the owner doesn't have the finances, the time, or the skills for larger scale projects. Other properties are left empty as an investment or because the owner is waiting for the right time to sell. It is important that the reasons why homes become and remain empty are understood and the Council try to ascertain these from the owners. A summary of related surveys and how they influenced the strategy can be found in the appendix 11.3.

5.4 How We Will Bring Empty Homes Back into Use

There are several ways in which an empty home can be returned to use, these may be through being:

- Sold into owner occupation.
- Privately rented.
- Occupied by the current owner.
- Let at affordable levels.
- Let through a Housing Association or by the Council.
- Sold as part of shared ownership schemes.
- Occupied leading from enforcement by the Council.
- Reuse of the land through demolition.

Within the Sub Regional Empty Homes Project various schemes and tools are available a summary of which is discussed below. However the schemes available will vary between the Councils involved and may change over time. For further details on what is available in each district, interested parties should contact the Councils directly.

Information and Guidance

The Empty Homes Project Officers provide a point of contact for owners of empty homes, and members of the community who are concerned about a property in their area. These officers can provide information packs which discuss some of the options and support available to owners or other interested parties.

The Council also provides information on becoming a Landlord, standards to adhere to, associated laws, statutory requirements and accreditation schemes. The Council may also be able to help with the advertisement of properties to facilitate a sale or letting.

Through the Empty Homes Project Officers and the Housing Needs department the Council may be able to help an owner find a tenant from people on the Housing Need register if an owner is struggling to find a tenant themselves. This can often be linked with rent deposit or rent advance schemes offered by the Council where by the Council will pay the deposit or provide a bond, and pay the first months rent to the landlord.

Local Authority Powers

Local Authorities have a number of statutory instruments available, a summary of which can be found in the appendix 11.4. These include powers requiring the owner to:

- Remove waste.
- Control vermin issues.
- Secure dangerous structures.
- Secure the property from unauthorised entry.
- Complete works where the condition of a property is affecting the amenity of the neighbourhood.
- Clear litter and graffiti.
- Restore the condition of listed buildings.

The Council can require that these works are completed, and if they are not the Council can complete the works in default and register a charge on the property. The Council will then seek to recover the debt, possibly through legal action or by applying for an enforced sale of the property.

Voluntary Acquisition and Leasing

Voluntary acquisition is when the owner of an empty home sells the property to a non-profit landlord such as a housing association, or to the Council. This is done in agreement with both parties; however sale on the open market is more common.

Voluntary or Private Leasing Schemes are where the Council, or an agent such as a housing association, would take on the lease of a property, this would usually be for no less than three years. This method is usually used when the owner does not wish to manage the property themselves but wants to retain ownership. The Council or managing agent may also guarantee a rental income to the owner during the period of the lease even if the property is vacant. The rental income is calculated from the rent received minus management fees and cost of repair in bringing the property up to the standard for letting. The condition and letting viability in line with housing need will have a significant impact on whether a property is suitable or not for the scheme.

Financial Assistance

The Council may provide advice to owners on VAT reductions available on the services received when renovating long term empty properties, and income tax relief for the conversion of flats above shops back into residential space. The Councils may also be able to direct owners towards discounts from local building merchants, letting and estate agents, and auction houses.

Some districts also offer Grants or Loans for the renovation or repair of long term empty properties subject to certain conditions. Interested parties should contact the Empty Homes Project Officers or refer to the Councils financial assistance policy.

Enforced Sale/ Order for Sale

Enforced Sale is where the Council force the sale of a property to recover a debt registered as a land charge. This debt may have occurred as a result of works completed in default, or a court imposed charging order placed on the property following non payment of Council Tax. During the process the owner can halt proceedings by paying the money owed, and the land charge is removed. With this procedure the Council never retains ownership of the property as it is sold directly into the open market.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)

The Housing Act 2004 introduced Empty Dwelling Management Orders. The Council can apply for an Interim EDMO which lasts for 1 year. During this time the Council can enter the property to identify and design schedules of work; they can also let the property should it be in reasonable condition with the owners consent. During this time voluntary measures should still be encouraged. If these fail the Council can apply for a Final EDMO; this involves an enforced lease on a property allowing work to be carried out to make the property habitable. The property is then rented out and the income will pay for the works carried out and any management costs. The use of these measures is to the Councils discretion, and they require the approval of the Residential Property Tribunal, (RPT). Throughout the order the owner retains ownership of the property.

Compulsory Purchase (CPO)

A compulsory purchase order is made where the owner of a troublesome property makes little or no effort to rectify problems associated with a property, or to have it occupied, and refuses to co-operate with the voluntary measures offered by the Council. The power can also be used where the owner of a property is untraceable. This power allows the Council to purchase a property from the owner to dispose of as they wish. These procedures can be costly and take a long time; careful consideration of the pros and cons is given before their use.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

6.1 The key stakeholders are:

- Members of the community affected by empty properties in their area, or who own an empty property and would like assistance in its reuse.
- Elected members.
- Officers of the Council who have involvement with empty properties.
- Key partners such as other Councils, Parish Councils, LSP members, businesses, agencies, charitable organisations, Housing Associations and RSL's.

6.2 Implementing the Strategy

Elected Members

Elected members have an important role in ensuring the public are aware of and understand the Empty Homes Strategy, and how it affects their community. They also provide an important line of referral for members of the community, and are part of the feedback loop communicating action and progress of the project.

Directors and Chief Executive

The Directors and Chief Executive have a responsibility to drive the strategy and ensure that the principles behind it and its strategic importance are reflected in wider Council Issues.

Service Managers and Team Leaders

Managers of departments involved in the Empty Property Working Group (EPWG), or who's Strategies have related aims and objectives have a responsibility to agree with the working practices discussed in the Strategy, and to facilitate good communication with the EPWG, and other departments.

Council Officers

Empty Property Working Groups involve representatives from the different departments working together to address the more problematic empty properties. These officers have responsibilities for meeting the aims and objectives of the strategy, and addressing the issues identified in the action plan.

6.3 Other Organisation Involved

Local businesses such as letting and estate agents, developers and building firms can have an interest in the implementation of some systems for tackling empty homes. Other organisations such as the Empty Homes Agency, National Association of Empty Property Practitioners and the East Midlands Empty Property Forum provide best practice guidance, training, and information relating to changes in statutory requirements. Registered Social Landlords will have involvement in reoccupation opportunities.

7. Monitoring, Review and Development

Each district has set their own targets in relation to empty homes. The success will then be monitored against these targets. Homes which have come into re-occupation through Council involvement will count towards the targets. This can be achieved through:

- Providing advice and guidance.
- Creating links with agents and tenants.
- Financial Assistance.
- Enforcement action.

- Purchases.
- Demolition orders and property rebuilds.

However there must be evidence that it is reasonable to believe that the involvement by the Council had significant influence on the property coming back into use or that the process was sped up through Council involvement. The Council also monitor preventative measures, where they have assisted an owner in preventing their property from becoming long term empty through assistance in finding tenants.

The strategy will be reviewed periodically in line with specified time frames. The achievements towards targets, success of certain measures, the usage of these measures and continued consultation will influence the strategy review, and the resources available to tackle empty homes.

8. Links to Other Strategies

The Empty Homes Strategy, its aims and outcomes will help to achieve priorities in other strategies, these are:

- The Lincolnshire County Homelessness Strategy 2008 - 2012, action C1 - investigate the need for a county wide resource to bring empty properties back into use.
- The Lincolnshire Housing Strategy 2009-2014 Task 2.2.2 Reduce the number of Empty Homes in Lincolnshire.
- Boston Borough Housing Strategy 2005-2009 - Action 1.9 Tackle the challenge posed by empty properties.
- Boston's Community Plan 2008-2018: Ambition - Being Healthy - Maximising the opportunity for people to live in a decent and affordable homes. Ambition - Creating a greener and sustainable future - Promoting sustainable lifestyles and development which minimises greenhouse gas emissions.
- City of Lincoln Private Sector Housing Strategy 2006 – 2011, target vacant dwellings to bring them back into use.
- ELDC Housing Strategy 2009 update, target number 1.3 of section 15; the outcome is a reduction in the number of empty properties.
- NKDC Housing Strategy 2009 -2014, priority 4 - produce an Empty Homes Strategy.
- South Holland District Council Housing Strategy 2006 – 2011, priority 1 provide more affordable housing - Develop an Empty Homes Strategy.
- WLDC Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2009 – 2011, includes the need to bring empty homes back into use, and tackle neighbourhood decline.

9. Communication

Multi-disciplinary working is essential with both internal and external agencies in achieving the aims of the strategy. Below is a list of the agencies involved, however this list is not exhaustive.

External	Internal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Residents• Local Strategic Partnership• Registered Social Landlords and other public landlords• Parish Councils• Private Sector Landlords• Specialist organisations within the third sector• Home Improvement Agency• Empty Homes Agency• Local property developers• Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue and the Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corporate Strategy• Council Tax• Housing Renewal/ Strategy• Environmental Health• Building Control• Planning Enforcement• Anti Social Behaviour Officers• Housing Need• Legal Department• Benefits• Conservation Officers

By utilising a corporate approach and working together the different District Councils are able to share knowledge and resources to achieve the best results. Multi agency working ensures that the project remains cost effective, and that the skills and resources available to the Councils are utilised effectively.

Empty Property Working Group (EPWG) meetings are held quarterly to discuss current cases and actions taken. These involve representatives from the different departments within the Council ensuring that a consistency in approach and knowledge of progress benefits everyone. The Empty Property Working Group is chaired by the Empty Homes Project Officers.

10. Contact Details

www.boston.gov.uk

www.lincoln.gov.uk

www.n-kesteven.gov.uk

www.sholland.gov.uk

www.west-lindsey.gov.uk

www.e-lindsey.gov.uk

Empty Homes Project Officers

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Empty Homes Project Steering Group

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East Lindsey District Council

Jonathan Challen – Private Sector Housing Team Leader

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Heather Kelly – Senior Housing Standards Officer

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Appendix 11.1

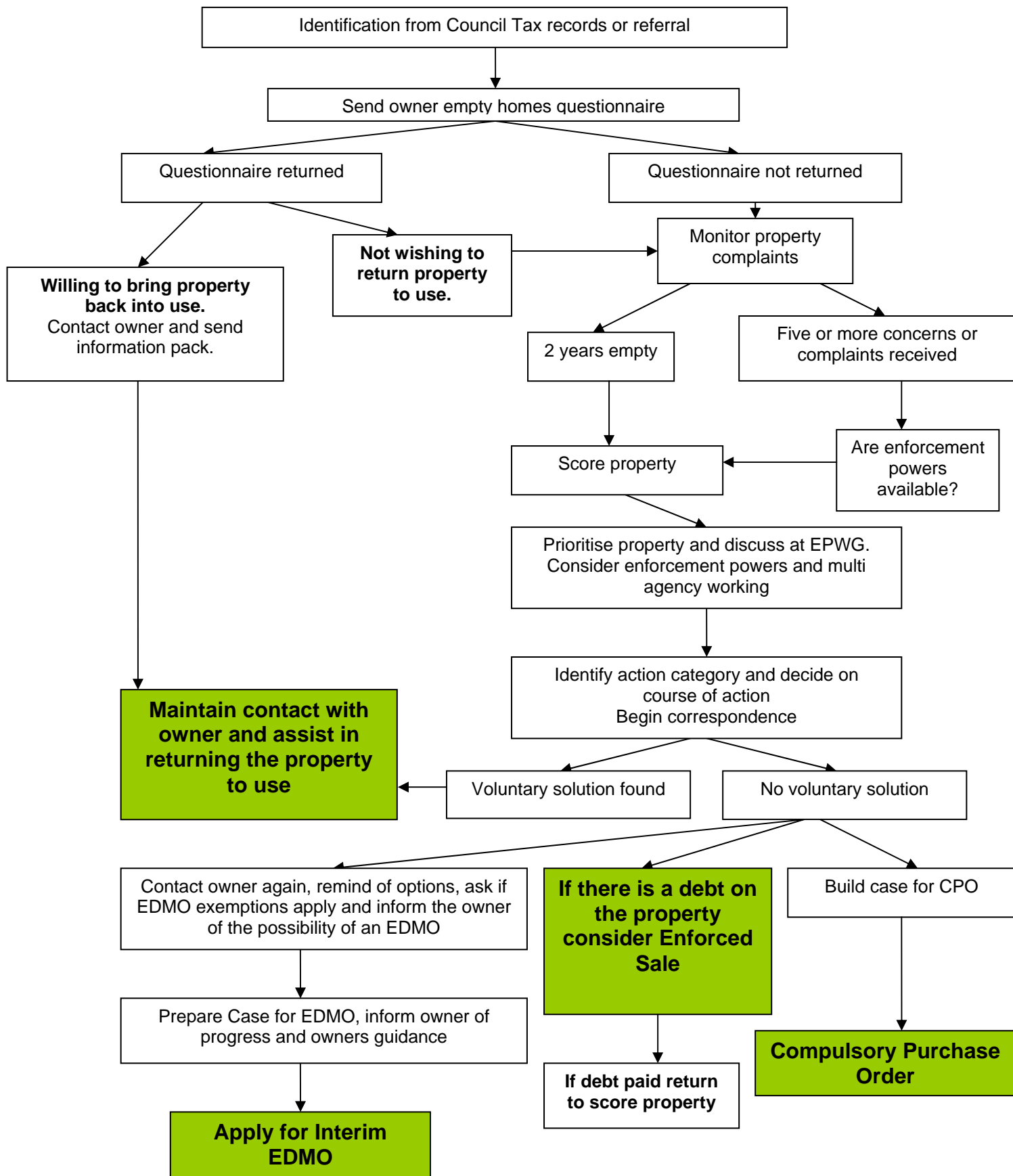
Sub Regional Empty Homes Project Action Plan					
1. Promote the Empty Homes Project					
Objective	Tasks to Achieve	Parties Involved	Resources	Time Scale	Outcomes
1.1. To maintain direction as a Sub Regional Group	1.1.1. To continue with regular steering group meetings between all districts involved in the group.	Empty Homes Project Officers Private Sector Housing Group	Internal	On going	Maintain project development and direction.
1.2. To establish primary data from the owners of empty homes within the districts.	1.2.1. Conduct a questionnaire survey of the top 100 empty homes within the districts.	Empty Homes Project Officers	Internal	2010	Understanding of the reasons why properties are empty, and tailor the project.
1.3. To ensure the project continues to be advertised and promoted	1.3.1. Send out leaflets on a periodic basis to owners of empty properties. 1.3.2. Send out information packs as requested or as part of property action plan.	Empty Homes Project Officers. Graphics External printing firm	Internal Cost of printing.	Periodically As identified	Increased interest in project, and meeting targets for reuse.
1.4. Ensure the Empty Homes Strategy is current and relevant.	1.4.1. Review the Strategy on a regular basis, based on service feedback and best practice guidance.	Empty Homes Project Officers Private Sector Housing Group	Internal	Annually	The Strategy remains current and purposeful.
1.5. Promote the project through large scale multi agency projects.	1.5.1. Identify possible avenues for projects in areas such as energy efficiency or homelessness.	Multi Agency Working	Internal External funding for some large scale projects.	2011	Increase awareness Provide a valuable resource from a wasted one.

Sub Regional Empty Homes Project Action Plan					
2. Identify and work with owners of empty properties to bring them back into use					
Objective	Tasks to Achieve	Parties Involved	Resources	Time Scale	Outcomes
2.1. Ensure data is current and objectively used.	2.1.1. Up date Empty property data base on a quarterly basis from Council Tax lists. 2.1.2. Produce lists of priority properties based on scoring system.	Empty Homes Project Officers Council Tax Department	Internal	Quarterly – Jan, Apr, Jul, Oct. In line with EPWG	Production of up to date lists of vacant properties in the area. Production of reports for EPWG
2.2. To maintain inter departmental working, and action priority properties.	2.2.1. To continue with Empty Property Working Groups, (EPWG) on a quarterly basis.	A wide range of Council Departments.	Internal	On going	Identify courses of action and maintenance of priority property list.

Sub Regional Empty Homes Project Action Plan					
3. Continue to develop the empty homes project					
Objective	Tasks to Achieve	Parties Involved	Resources	Time Scale	Outcomes
3.1. Continue to widen the voluntary measures available to owners.	3.1.1. Liaise with RSL's and managing agents for the development of a Private Sector leasing Scheme. 3.1.2. Review ranges of Grants and Loans available in the districts periodically.	Empty Homes Project Officers Private Sector Housing Group RSL's and managing agents	Internal External liaising	2010 Periodically	Increase in affordable housing. Reduction in LTE properties. Improved stock quality.
3.2. Further explore the range of enforcement	3.2.1. Continue to develop enforcement	Empty Homes Project Officers	Internal Additional resources to	June 2010	Reduce numbers of run down properties,

measures available.	protocol. 3.2.2. Identify properties for enforcement.	Legal shared services Internal departments	be identified.	June 2010	or high priority properties.
3.3. Help to meet targets of related strategies.	3.3.1. Provide Empty Homes updates for the Lincolnshire County Homelessness Strategy Steering Group, (LCHSG). 3.3.2. Promote links with affordable housing through Empty Homes Strategy.	Empty Homes Project Officers. Homelessness Strategy Steering Group Housing Strategy Housing Renewal	Internal	As per LCHSG forward plan.	Identify projects for homelessness, and sources of additional affordable housing. Reduce homelessness, and increase stock of affordable homes.

Appendix 11.2 Empty Homes Pathway



Appendix 11.3

Research and Surveys

University of Nottingham

The University of Nottingham, commissioned by the East Midlands Empty Properties Forum conducted an Empty Properties Survey in 2008, this included North Kesteven District Council. They sent surveys to 5095 owners of empty homes, of which they received an 11% return rate. They looked at what people are doing with their properties, how long people felt their property would be empty, and owners preferred forms of assistance from the Councils. They found that of the surveys returned 59% would be selling or letting the property in 1 year. The results also showed that 42% were currently marketing their property, and 63% were renovating their property. The two main groups who said the property would not be occupied or ready for occupation in 1 year were those who purchased the property to live in and those that inherited their property. Of the respondents only 2 stated they were purposefully leaving the property empty. Two of the main reasons for properties remaining empty were renovation costs, and the current housing market condition. The most common forms of assistance requested were grants, followed by lists of professionals and trades people and advice on organising improvements and repairs. The type of assistance least likely to be used was private sector leasing schemes.

Although the return rate for the survey was low there are still some key factors which influenced the strategy:

- Allowing properties to remain empty for two years prior to commencing scoring and action. This is as a result of the high number of respondents who were marketing or renovating their property, and the respondents' frustration at the current housing market.
- The type of assistance offered reflects the findings of the survey. Emphasis is placed on providing information and advice as well as support at completing works. The officers involved build positive working relationships with owners. The use of private sector leasing schemes should be considered as it is a vital voluntary solution for owners prior to enforcement action.
- Focused support is offered to those who have inherited a property. Owners may have inherited an old and dilapidated property and not have the skills or knowledge to renovate and manage the property. These may be the perfect properties for voluntary leasing schemes.

Government Office for the East of England

MORI conducted a Survey of Empty Homes in the East of England on behalf of the Government Office for the East of England in 2005. Their focus during this survey was, why properties are empty, the obstacles in returning them to use and the solutions. They identified 3294 empty properties and received a 37% return rate. From this they found the main reasons for properties being empty were, 37% had repairs and renovations in progress, 17% are in need of repairs, 9% plan on conducting repairs, and 9% can't afford the repairs. The

findings also stated that 28% were trying to sell the property. Only 3% reported that the property was not for occupation. When asked about what services and support they may use, 27% stated grants, 11% loans, 10% guaranteed rental income and 8% advice and help. However 50% said none at all.

The findings from this survey are in line with the findings from the Nottingham survey and influenced the strategy in a similar way:

- The 2 year start point for the EPWG is supported by the high number of owners currently renovating or trying to sell the property.
- The support and assistance will involve financial aid where available, including grants and loans, as well as advice on conducting repair works and finding tenants.
- The 50% of respondents who wish to have no involvement or support from the Council highlights the need for this strategy with emphasis on building positive working relationships with owners of empty homes to increase awareness of what the Council can offer.

Boston Borough Council

Boston Borough Council conducted a survey of 538 empty properties in 2006. Their main findings showed that 68% of respondents' properties had been empty for over 2 years. The reasons for the properties being empty were, 30% planning to repair, 29% in need of repair, 26% being repaired, and 11% stated the property was for sale. When asked what services offered by the Council would help, the main response was 61% stating a grant to assist in the completion of repairs.

These findings show similar trends locally, and had similar input in to the aims of the strategy:

- The 2 year start point for empty properties is useful as a large percentage of the long term empties fell into this category. This maybe as the less troublesome properties naturally turned over within this time period.
- The advice and support from the Council will focus on the repair and renovation of properties. This includes grants and loans (where available), guidance to other assistance with repair works such as VAT reductions and help in organising repairs.

Appendix 11.4

Statutory Powers in Relation to Empty Homes

Dangerous or dilapidated buildings or structures.	Building Act 1984, Sections 77 and 78.	To require the owner to make the property safe (sec 77) or enable LA to take emergency action to make safe (sec 78).
	Housing Act 2004, Section 5	Where category 1 hazards exist duty to take action.
Unsecured properties where there is a risk it may be entered or suffer vandalism/arson, etc.	Building Act 1984, Section 79	Allows LA to fence off the property if dangerous, this can lead to a demolition notice.
	Local Gov (Misc Provisions) Act 1982, Section 29.	To require owner to secure the property or allow LA to board up in an emergency.
	Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003 part 1A amendment.	Closure notice prohibiting entry on premises associated with persistent nuisance or disorder, requires a magistrates order, but the Council can perform necessary action to prohibit access including boarding up.
Vermin (whether present or there is a risk of attracting vermin).	Public Health Act 1961, Section 34.	To require owner to remove waste so that vermin not attracted to site.
	Prevention of Damage by Pest Act 1949, section 4. Public Health Act 1936, Section 83.	To require the destruction of rats and mice or keeping land free from them
	Environmental Protection Act 1990, section 80.	Use this power to cure vermin issues, remove waste where there is a nuisance to someone else.
Unightly land and property affecting the amenity of an area.	Public Health Act 1961, section 34.	To require the owner to remove waste from the property.
	Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 215-219.	To require the owner to address unsightly land or the external appearance of the property.
	Clean Neighbourhoods Act 2005, Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003.	To require the owner to remove rubbish and clear graffiti.
	Building Act 1984, section 79.	To require the owner to take steps to address a property adversely affecting the amenity of an area through its disrepair.
	Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.	Empty listed building or building in conservation areas that are falling into disrepair the Council can undertake works for their preservation.
Properties that have been vacant in excess of 6 months where negotiation has been unsuccessful in returning it back into use.	Housing Act 2004, section 134.	To grant local authority the powers to take over the management of a property initially under an interim EDMO the final EDMO.
Sharing of data from other Council departments.	Local Government Act 2003, section 85.	Allows the Council Tax department to share the addresses of empty properties, the owners name and contact details.

Powers of Entry.	Housing Act 2004, section 239.	Members of the Council can enter unoccupied premises or land to carry out inspections in relation to its statutory capacities.
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Appendix 11.5

Scoring Sheet Methodology and Explanation

Determining priority cases for corporate action.

1. A data base of empty properties is kept, properties will be identified after 2 years of un-occupation. These properties, along with any referred as troublesome will be recorded, this is known as the long list.
2. This list will be updated every quarter prior to the Empty Property Working group meetings. Occupied or demolished properties removed, and new properties added.
3. The properties on the long list will be prioritised using the scoring matrix; the top properties from the list will be included on the short list for corporate action.
4. These cases will be discussed during the Empty Property Working Group meetings.
5. These properties are then given an action group:
 1. None
 2. Monitor
 3. Negotiate with owner
 4. Renovate
 5. Enforcement action
 6. EDMO
 7. ESP
 8. CPO
 9. Demolish
6. The scores will be updated as new information is made apparent, and reviewed quarterly. This may include further property visits.
7. The scoring system is described in the attached explanation notes.

**Lincolnshire Sub Regional
Empty Homes Project**

Long Term Empty Property Score Sheet

Owners Name:

Empty Property Address:

	Factor	Score	Weighting	Weighted Score
1.	Number of complete years empty.	5	X [] Multiply by number of years empty.	=
2.	Number of notifications from the public. (Include from Empty Homes Agency)	5	X [] Multiply by number of separate notifications	=
3.	Number of interventions by other departments. Work completed in default.	5 10	X [] + X [] Multiply by number of interventions over last 5 years.	=
4.	Condition of Dwelling: a. Habitable, well maintained. b. Just acceptable. c. Seriously defective. d. Potentially or actually uninhabitable.	0 5 10 20	X1	=
5.	Condition Environmental: a. Well maintained. b. Unattractive. c. Detrimental to amenity of neighbourhood. d. Presents high risk, extremely unsightly. (Impacts on neighbouring properties).	0 5 10 20	X1	=
6.	a. Not in conservation area, not listed. b. Conservation area. c. Listed property.	0 10 20	X1	=

	Factor	Score	Weighting	Weighted Score
7.	Location and Prominence: a. Isolated. b. No vehicle access. c. Vehicle access. d. Busy road. e. Prominent position.	0 5 10 15 20	X1	=
8.	Attracting criminal activity, e.g. graffiti, vandalism, drug abuse, fly tipping and squatters Record score of 10 for visible signs of criminal activity on property visit.	10	X [] Multiply by number of times Police or Fire and Rescue or Anti Social Behaviour Team known to have visited over last 5 years.	=
9.	Council tax band C. Actual tax band =	15	Add 5 points for each band above, take away 5 points for each band below.	=
10.	Deleted from Council Tax records.	20	X 1	=
11.	Money owed to Council: Nothing £1-£500 £501-£1000 Over £1000 Actual owed to Council, £	0 5 10 15	X [] Multiply by number of year's debt outstanding. Include charges on property for works in default.	=
12.	No other property owned by owner and known to be empty, (i.e. on long list). Other empty properties owned by same person, (list below).	0 10	X [] Multiply by number of known empty properties. Include cross district ownership. (Exclude new build if in good condition.)	=
13.	In an area of priority action as defined by Council, e.g. Renewal Area.	20	X 1	=
14.	Identified as an area of housing need within the district.	20	X1	=
Total				=

Lincolnshire Long Term Empty Properties Score Sheet

Explanatory Notes

	Factor Heading	Notes
1.	Number of complete years empty	This is taken from Council Tax records or through notification. The property is not included in the long list until it has been empty for 2 years or causing problems.
2.	Number of notifications from the public. (include from Empty Homes Agency)	This is the number of notifications the Council receives from members of the public or Council members. Notifications may come through the Empty Homes Agency website.
3.	Number of interventions by other departments. Work completed in default.	This is the number of separate, or repeated interventions by other Council departments. The property will score higher if the works are completed in default. This is also added in the debt owed to Council category.
4.	Condition of Dwelling: a. Habitable, well maintained. b. Just acceptable. c. Seriously defective. d. Potentially or actually uninhabitable.	This is the current condition of the building and fixtures. This will include drainage, windows and doors, roof and structural damage. If the officer cannot gain access then base on the external condition of the property.
5.	Condition Environmental: a. Well maintained. b. Unattractive. c. Detrimental to amenity of neighbourhood. d. Presents high risk, extremely unsightly. (Impacts on neighbouring properties).	This is the condition of the grounds surrounding the property. This will include rubbish, overgrown gardens and poor maintenance. Level c is equivalent to the condition required to prompt section 215 enforcement action.
6.	a. Not in conservation area, not listed. b. Conservation area. c. Listed property.	This information can be found on the shared data base and links with the priorities of the neighbourhood.
7.	Location and Prominence: a. Isolated. b. No vehicle access. c. Vehicle access. d. Busy road. e. Prominent position.	This reflects the visual impact of the property. Properties in cul-de-sac's are at level c, properties can then be scored accordingly.
8.	Attracting criminal activity, e.g. graffiti, vandalism, drug abuse, fly tipping and squatters.	Anti Social Behaviour Officers, Community Liaison Officers and Community Fire Safety Officers may be able to provide this information. Graffiti, signs of drug use and street drinking

	Record score of 10 for visible signs of criminal activity on property visit.	can be seen on visual inspection.
9.	Council tax band C. Actual tax band =	This will identify the level of income that could be obtained if the property was occupied.
10.	Deleted from Council Tax records.	As above – some of these properties may require demolition orders.
11.	Money owed to Council: Nothing £1-£500 £501-£1000 Over £1000 Actual owed to Council, £	The maximum number of years will be 12, after this the debt is not recoverable.
12.	No other property owned by owner and known to be empty, (i.e. on long list). Other empty properties owned by same person, (list below).	This will reflect serial empty property owners. However construction firms who own numerous empty new build properties should be considered for removal from the top 40.
13.	In an area of priority action as defined by Council, e.g. Renewal Area.	This will reflect Council priorities in renewal and regeneration.
14.	Identified as an area of housing need within the district.	This will reflect the Councils ability and the local need to house people in the property.